

Household Hazardous Waste Event offers disposal options for Bitterrooters

Warmer weather and longer days are prompting many folks to join the age-old ritual of spring cleaning. In the next few weeks, while you're washing the windows and shaking out the rugs, consider venturing into the garage or barn to assess your stock of toxic and hazardous chemicals.

This year, for the first time, Ravalli County will have its own Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event at which county residents can safely dispose of a whole host of hazardous materials. Sponsored by the Ravalli County Environmental Health Department (RCEH), the two day event will take place Friday, May 16 and Saturday, May 17 at the north lot of the Ravalli County Fairgrounds.

What's considered hazardous?

Any product labeled toxic, poison, corrosive, flammable, combustible or irritant is considered hazardous. Products labeled "danger" or "poison" are highly toxic, and those that carry a "warning" or "caution" are less toxic.

Below is a list of hazardous materials that will be accepted at the May event:

Materials accepted free of charge: Oil-based paints and stains, used solvents (paint thinners and degreasers); rechargeable nickel-cadmium batteries (alkaline batteries can be thrown away); aerosol paints (small amounts can be sprayed on cardboard and empty cans may be thrown away); fertilizers, pesticides no longer registered for use by EPA; used motor oil, antifreeze and gasoline; and fluorescent bulbs.

Materials accepted for a fee*: Unwanted pesticides currently registered for use by EPA, mercury, caustics, poisons, strong acids (nitric, sulfuric, hydrochloric), chlorinated solvents.

*County residents pay one quarter of our disposal costs or about \$3.50 per gallon.

Certain materials will not be accepted at the event, either because they are not considered hazardous or because other disposal options exist:

Latex paint -- Latex is non-hazardous. It's best to use it or give it away if possible. Latex paint can be solidified using cat litter as an absorbent. Then it can be thrown in the garbage.

Car batteries -- Car batteries contain lead and other heavy metals. They can be taken to any store that sells them, where they should be accepted free of charge.

Alkaline Batteries can be thrown in the garbage.

Computer or e-waste -- Computers and monitors also contain lead and other toxic materials. All sorts of computer and electronic waste can be taken to Missoula's E-Waste event on Saturday, April 26. Sponsored by Sony Electronics, MT DEQ, and Missoula Water Quality District, the e-waste event will take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Missoula County Fairgrounds. The first five electronic items will be accepted free, and additional items will cost \$1 each. For 10 items or more call 800-433-8773 to register.

Because this is the first year for our Household Hazardous Waste Event, many of the details are still being ironed out. The event is intended to target household waste, so businesses with large quantities of hazardous material will likely be charged a fee, or other disposal options may have to be arranged. Call RCEH for more information – 375-6565.

This event was funded largely by a grant from EPA administered by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. In addition, many local individuals, organizations and municipalities have donated to make this event a success. Local donors, thus far, include: City of Hamilton, Rapp Family Foundation, Bitterroot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Stockfarm Club, Greenpath Properties, Kinetico Quality Water, and Judy Estler.

Since the funding for this event came from a grant, there's no guarantee we will get it again next year. Missoula County has held a Household Hazardous Waste Event annually for 15 years, but the events have been funded by their local water quality district. With no such funding source, Ravalli County is left to find the money on a year-to-year basis.

Whatever money is left over from this year's event will go toward having a similar event next year. Anyone wishing to contribute toward household hazardous waste collection in Ravalli County may do so by sending a check to Ravalli County Environmental Health Department. All donations are tax deductible.

Keeping hazardous materials out of our aquifer will help protect our water quality for years to come. So head out to the garage and see what you can find!

In order to help citizens understand more clearly many of the environmental health issues in Ravalli County and the role of the Environmental Health Department in addressing these issues, our department will run a series of weekly newspaper articles titled "Environmental Health Talk."

In this ongoing series we hope to help raise the community's awareness of issues such as air and water quality and give readers useful tips on topics like recycling, collecting and disposing of hazardous materials and maintaining septic systems, just to name a few. To this end, we welcome public comment. If there's an environmental health issue you'd like us to address, write call or email the department: RCEH, c/o "EnviroHealth Talk," 215 South 4th St, Suite D, Hamilton MT 59840. Phone: 375-6571. Email: rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov